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REMARKS BY
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GENERAL JAMES T. CONWAY: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the honor you've just bestowed. It's great to be with you tonight; thank you for coming.

Folks, at the organizer's request tonight, I've been asked to share my "insights on any foreign policy issue that plausibly relates to the lessons of Pearl Harbor and the necessity of eternal vigilance." Now, that's pretty heavy stuff for a Marine, and I will endeavor to satisfy the request.

With a tasking like that, the first thing you do is go back and re-read about Pearl Harbor, and there were some interesting things that came out. The order of battle of Pearl Harbor has shown that the Japanese had 423 aircraft – combat aircraft – and 33 ships or submarines. American forces on the island had 481 combat aircraft and 70 ships or submarines.

We actually outnumbered the attacking force, but the difference – what they had that we suffered – was surprise. What's been said about surprise by someone as famous as Heinz Guderian is, "Since time immemorial, there have been lively, self-confident commanders who have exploited the principle of surprise – the means whereby inferior forces may snatch victory and turn downright impossible conditions to their own advantage. The effects on the morale of both parties are immense." So I thought I would talk to you tonight about surprise, and the possible impacts that it could have on our foreign policy and the concept of eternal vigilance.

Surprise is also a principle of war. And if you read about it, what it says is that speed and secrecy – deception – must be present. But there is also an element of risk for this force that would attempt surprise. Interestingly, if you look at the principles of war of other nations, surprise is invariably present – those other principles will change out, in some cases

dramatically, but two things almost always prevail: surprise and the concept of unity of command. Now, you know, at times, we made much of the Japanese surprise attack; we call it a sneak attack. They, of course, made the effort to attempt to notify us just moments before the planes went in, which did not work well. But in reality, if they look to their Axis allies to the West, there were ample evidences of surprise that the Hitler government had employed against its neighbors.

There are three levels of surprise: surprise at the strategic level, which basically involves the relationships of the nation-state; surprise at the operational level; and then surprise at the tactical level. When Hitler attacked Poland in 1939, he achieved virtually all of these; it was an unexpected attack. His operational capacity with this new thing called "blitzkrieg" was something that Europe had not seen before. And his tactics were, without question, quite effective. When he attacked France, I don't think, at that point, he had strategic surprise, because France had declared war, but he certainly had operational surprise. They manned up the Maginot; he went around them, through the Low Countries and through the Ardennes.

Certainly, with the Russian attack, once again, I think he probably had strategic surprise, because they were talking peace and I think it did surprise the Russians; but of course, they had surprises of their own that they would bring to bear some months and years later.

It's said that surprise generates momentum. There's a quote by Liddell Hart in 1929 that says, "Movement generates surprise and surprise gives impetus to movement." That is normally the case. Surprise will normally culminate in victory, but not always.

An example of it being highly successful is the Japanese attack on Singapore. The city-state of Singapore expected a Japanese landing force coming from the sea; what it got was a Japanese force that landed behind them on the Malay Peninsula and then attacked down a landward route to the rear of the city. Thirty-five-thousand Japanese attacked 70,000 British and captured 68,000 of them after 12 days, the complete culmination of a surprise attack, and certainly, an operationally successful surprise attack.

In 1967, the Israelis cut that figure [the number of days] in half; threatened on their border, they launched a surprise attack against the aircraft of both Egypt and Syria – wiped out 309 to 320 Egyptian aircraft. Then, on the following five or six days, they virtually destroyed the Syrian and Egyptian forces as a result of the success of their surprise. So, often – more often than not – it will result in a culmination of success, but not always.

If you look at the Battle of the Bulge, the Germans in December of '44 were not able to culminate a surprise attack as they launched through the Ardennes, because they didn't have the weight for the attack and they didn't have the logistics to support it.

Another example was MARKET GARDEN, where the risk was just too great and the plan not sufficiently precise to ensure that the risk wouldn't come to bear on British and U.S. forces.

Our own country has had a bit of a mixed bag in terms of attempting to achieve surprise. I think that we achieved operational surprise at Normandy. It was always known that we were going

over there to go against the continent, but the time and place at the beach was a surprise – tactical surprise, maybe, with the Rangers at Du Hoc – but I think even after we landed, we saw more tactical surprise in terms of American ingenuity coming into play.

In the Pacific islands, our own examples of Marines in the Pacific, once we started taking islands, there was no strategic surprise in that. Operational surprise probably existed, because the Japanese were never sure which island; but we lost tactical surprise, because there were only so many beaches, and the bloody fights that we saw in the Pacific were a result of those predictable beaches that we had to go across, with one exception that was a place called Tinian.

The bombs that struck the Japanese mainland – we had no strategic surprise there because we had been bombing their cities almost daily. But the nature of those bombs was certainly an operational surprise that led to a strategic kind of a consideration in just a few days.

Probably our best example of achieving all three – strategic, operational and tactical surprise – came with General MacArthur and his actions at Inchon. And of course what happened with that landing, where it should not have been conducted with the success that certainly then followed. Okay, so you get the point on surprise, right?

So, General, what is your follow-up point? (Laughter.)

Well, the question is: how do we protect and defend this great nation if surprise is inevitable? And that's the role of the military, some of whom you met tonight; that's the role that we as the Joint Chiefs all take very, very seriously. We had a Joint Chiefs of Staff meeting here not long ago with the Secretary of Defense talking about our global strategy, particularly our strategy in the Middle East. Even as much as you have seen him in the press talking about the fact that we have to build the military to match the threats that we see, he said that the one constant in warfare is surprise. So, even though he may feel, deep in his heart, that we need to build the military towards a certain end, that just elevates the potential for surprise, potentially, on the other side – and he well acknowledges that.

But the key is not to be found sleeping. Admiral Yamamoto – this was also a discovery – on 7 January, 1942, 30 days after Pearl Harbor, said "A military man can scarcely pride himself on having smitten a sleeping animal. It is more a matter of shame, simply, for the one smitten." So I think the lesson in that quote is that we, as a nation, can no longer – can never again – find ourselves asleep at a time when a nation would otherwise attempt to surprise us.

If you look at where we are today, engaged as we are, in two wars against terrorism, the terrorists rely on surprise. Not in the traditional military sense – their surprise is a horrific surprise; it's intended, witness Mumbai most recently, to be as terrible as it possibly can, to inject fear into your hearts, to inject uncertainty into where the next strike might come from.

Well, of course, it's not an existential kind of threat; they have no ability to follow up. It's a very few men, and only men, who are attempting to create this terror. But yet, it's a real capability and one that we must engage in and one that we must protect our citizenry against as

far as terrorism is concerned. But it's not this threat that we have to build our military against; it's the threat of the future.

We asked, about 16 months ago, in the Corps to have our [Strategic] Vision Group tell us, what will be the world that we see in 2020 to 2025? We thought that was kind of the sweet spot, because beyond 2025, I think you're probably guessing; short of that – short of 2020, you're not influencing some expensive programs. What they told us was interesting, and I'd like to share some of it with you tonight.

They said, first of all, that demographics are having an incredible effect on the world that we know and the world that we studied, and in some cases, grew up with. There is, in some ways, a silent invasion taking place in Europe. The industrialized nations are getting older; the non-industrialized nations have a younger population, and one that, in many cases, is experiencing incredible numbers of unemployment, which, by itself is a cause for friction. They told us that, by 2025, 70 percent of the people of the world will live within 35 miles of a seacoast in what they termed "urban sprawl" – conditions ripe for insurgents or terrorists, even if you accept that our fights will probably be in and amongst the people in the future. Certainly, from a parochial perspective, it points to the value of the Navy, Marine Corps, and, increasingly, Coast Guard team.

They tell us that by 2025 that these efforts that we're making today towards other means of energy will continue to develop, but will not be mature enough to depart from oil. Oil will continue to grease our machines; oil will continue to drive, in many ways, the way we see the world. But they also highlight for us that by then, water will be as important as oil. Today, roughly 40 percent of the nations of the world are water-stressed to some greater or lesser degree; water is a basic human need and nations will flat be ready to go to war to ensure a drinking supply for their populations, something that I think we all have to keep an eye on. They tell us that the United States will continue to be a critically important country to the world; our business, our economy, our diplomacy and our military will still be first-tier. But we won't be alone. It will not be the same world that we saw for a couple of decades after the Wall fell – that a booming China, a resurgent Russia, the collective strength of the European countries, India – will all be joining us as tier one nations on this world stage, and we've got to learn to live with that. Things won't always be at our beck and call.

So, will we still be important? Absolutely. As important? I think that's probably questionable. And lastly, they tell us there's a possibility, of course, that we could see the rise of a near-peer competitor, of a China or a Russia, that would see the necessity to go to conflict with us, but the more likely probability is what's called now a "hybrid threat." And that's potentially third-world or non-state actors with very high levels of sophistication in terms of training and weapons.

Probably the best example of that was the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict that you saw in '06. The Hezbollah, a political party, if you will, still had the ability to reach out 12 miles at sea and take down ships with sophisticated missile systems, and knock out the equivalent of a battalion of Israeli tanks with fourth- and fifth-generation wire-guided systems.

So that is very much the threat that I think Secretary Gates is talking about; that's what these people predict that we will see for the most part as our military, and that we need to be prepared accordingly. So how do we mitigate surprise in the face of all of that?

Well, I think a number of ways. First of all, we do it through intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. Interestingly, I think those three areas relate to strategic operational and tactical avoidance of surprise. A good commander – the good Commander-in-Chief – will make sure that those elements are in place to help safeguard the Nation as a whole.

We do it, I believe, by continuing to forward-base and deploy our forces. That today is our methodology for defending this great land. It's our belief that we're best not to defend our Nation's shores, but to do it well forward in other places, in other times, at places of our choosing. And so we have – now I think we validated that concept – that that's where a significant chunk of our forces need to be.

We do it through readiness of the force. We're talking about people assigned to the right jobs, we're talking about equipment being in the proper places, we're talking about the logistics to do what has to be done in a fairly rapid fashion. We're talking about the training necessary to ensure that our Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen – and even coastguardsmen, again – are prepared to do what must be done. We have to create in those same forces a bias for action. Because, if you're surprised there are two immediate reactions: one is flight, one is fight. And we if we are surprised – that's at whatever level – have to be prepared to fight; there can be no question about that.

To draw a corollary: if you were to poke a sleeping Lab, when you wake him his tail will be down and he may be ready to flight. If you poke a sleeping German Shepard, he comes out snarling at you with his teeth bared. One is the retriever; the other is a guardian – he was bred to guard and take on the wolf. That's how we have to prepare our forces to protect against the wolf. Your training and your planning have to be solvent. They have to be insightful in terms of what you might face. They have to be adaptable.

Again, an example: about 30 miles south of here we train lieutenants at a place called Quantico. We teach them to be prepared for the unexpected. There's a particular drill that I really enjoy watching take place at the infantry officer's course. We'll assign a patrol leader that will lead the single most important patrol that they'll do there in about eight weeks of training. And this officer is given ample time to do his reconnaissance, set up his element leaders, rehearse, prepare his order and so forth. On the first day of the execution of the patrol, and it's about a four-day patrol, they move outside the wire, a single shot rings out and the patrol leader is dead. We turn to the assistant patrol leader and say, "Son, you're in charge." So it was never about the patrol leader; it's about the assistant patrol leader and how prepared he is to step into place. We think that's great training.

We think that our planning needs to provide for decision points; it needs to be flexible. On the march to Baghdad we had 23 decision points along the way and our guidance to our planners was never, ever, give us a plan that doesn't have a number of options along the way, to the extent

that if we can't do (A) we must very quickly transition and do (B) or (C). That's how we need to train our people into thinking.

And lastly, the staffs need to be trained in an aggressive fashion so that they almost welcome surprise, that their ability to work inside what we call the OODA – Observation Orientation Decision and Action – loop is faster than the other guy. And if you can accomplish that, then you will react faster than he and you can get done what has to be done in a much more precise fashion. Those are just some of the training highlights that I think we need to ensure that we train all of our forces to in order to mitigate this process of surprise.

We have a tremendous Joint force today. We like operating as a Joint capability; there's synergy, there's power in that. Each service does it in its own way. I won't talk about how the other services do it, I'm mostly familiar with my own, but I will discuss how we as the Marine Corps approach that.

We consider ourselves to be a force-in-readiness. Our guidance in the law is to be most ready when the Nation is least ready to do what has to be done. We look on the fact that right now we are pretty good at counterinsurgency; we're doing those things that must be done in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and yet there's another level of requirement out there that we could see that involves major contingency operations. So we say that we must be balanced in our approach. We can't be all war or all the other because, for obvious reasons, you're not as prepared as you should be, should that surprise emerge.

We call it being a two-fisted fighter, equally able to go either way. And that's the way we're attempting to develop the force. Then we have some problems doing that; as committed as we are today – it's tough; but, we know where we need to get to, we know what we want for the Nation, we know what our niche is, and we're anxious to get there. We see that our Corps in its role has tremendous value to the Nation.

It is, in a phrase, "lean and mean". We are appropriated about 6 percent of the national Department of Defense budget. For that 6 percent we provide 24 percent of the maneuver battalions; about 15 percent of the fixed-wing aircraft – attack aircraft, if you will; about 21 percent of the attack helicopters.

There are officers in my Corps that would say we're a heck of a bureaucracy, but that fact is that we have 15 Marines for every one civilian that we have in the Corps. Other services come in – two, three, four or five. But we pride ourselves, again, on not having too many civilians over and above what it takes to get the job done.

We are expeditionary. Now, different services will have different definitions of what expeditionary is. Ours is fast and austere and lethal, emphasis on the austere. We build our systems so that we move into a location that otherwise may look like a moonscape, but to us it looks like home because we have all the things we need coming off that plane and coming off those ships that it is going to take to live there and perhaps operate out of there for some time to come.

There's a quote – a paraphrase, if you will – attributed to George Orwell that Americans should sleep comfortably in their beds at night knowing that rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would do us harm. Ladies and gentlemen, you have a lot of rough men in the mountains and the deserts of Afghanistan and Iraq these days, who I hope, are causing you to sleep comfortably in your beds at night.

Let me close by offering to you that the U.S. military wasn't frustrated in the wake of 2001. This whole concept of forward defense – defending the country well away from its shores – somehow didn't work for us when 19 people slipped through our defenses and attacked our cities. We had to go back and revalidate – reassure ourselves that this forward defense, in particular, is the best way to operate. But we've done that and we are convinced, and that's what you see taking place today.

We are comfortable that we are taking on terrorists that are otherwise might be trying to work their way into Los Angeles or Boston to attack our cities once again. We're comfortable taking those people on, again, in the mountains of Afghanistan and the deserts of Iraq. We see that as our goal. Some of us will be killed – that's the nature of war, but we will take many more of them with us if that is the eventuality. Again, that's the role, unfortunately, that the military has to play on behalf of its country.

So I will speak for my counterparts in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and finally say to you that we fully accept the responsibility for eternal vigilance for this great land, and with your support, we think we can continue to provide peace and prosperity and security for the United States for a long time to come. God bless you all and thank you for having me.

(Applause.)

(END)